INTRODUCTION

Archaeology of a Vanished World

What will be presented here as the 'archaeology of a vanished world' does not set out to be a new history of the Soviet Union but attempts to imagine the history of this country in a novel way, certainly one that differs from many of the impressive histories currently available. The Soviet Union was not only a political system with a datable beginning and an end, but a form of life with its own history, maturity, decline and fall. With its practices, values and routines, it shaped the citizens of the nation for many generations to come.[1] I term this longstanding lifeworld 'Soviet civilisation', disregarding the validity or otherwise of its claims to be superior to the old world, capitalism or the West. Lifeworlds may be older and more stable than political systems and they may live on even after the end of a system has been proclaimed and established.[2] They leave their traces well beyond that end, as everyone who has lived in any of the states that have emerged from great empires knows: languages, the style of schools and administrative buildings, infrastructure and railway lines, manners, educational institutions and biographies, the hatred of or sentimental attachment to the masters of former years—these phenomena can be seen everywhere, whether in the former territories of the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Danube Monarchy or even the German Reich. The situation with the Soviet Union is not very different. Its vestiges will persist—as physical traces and on the mental maps of inhabitants of what is now a postimperial, postcolonial world—long after the USSR as a political entity has passed away.

This is where archaeology comes in. It takes the territory of a former empire as its field of operations. It then inspects and secures the various traces; it sets up probes and carries out excavations—literally and metaphorically. Archaeologists do not dig in a haphazard fashion; they follow up clues that can lead to further findings. They have their navigation tools and maps and, above all, entire libraries in their heads. What they are looking for are the remains of earlier generations. They lay bare one stratum after another, secure their findings, catalogue the fragments and take all steps necessary for subsequent conservation and analysis. Their findings are destined to inform them about a world that has ceased to exist. The fragments they have learned to decipher enable them to create a picture, the text of a past era. Each of these fragments has its own past and the trick is to make them speak. Together these fragments form a mosaic and the stories these lifeless objects yield up all come together to create what we think of as 'history'. On occasion, archaeologists unexpectedly encounter strata and objects that force them to reject interpretations, periodisations and contexts that have been handed down to them. These are their moments of epiphany.

Uncovering objects, rescuing them, making them speak—that is the archaeological path proposed here. It implies also a rather broader definition of a 'document', a 'source'. To imagine the world of a past epoch calls for more than merely written documents, reports, testimony, a collection of files, all of which are basically the objective products of human existence (if we ignore for the moment the accretions of nature). The world can be read via the history of things, the analysis of signs and modes of interaction, places and routines. The totality grows out of the details so that, if everything counts, the principal question in a project relating the history of Soviet civilisation is where to begin and where to stop. Do you start with the great buildings of communism or the little porcelain figurines of the 1930s, with the voice of the speaker on Radio Moscow or the parade of athletes, with Gorky Park or the camps on the Kolyma River, the building of a mausoleum or the beaches on the Red Riviera? This list is not uttered in the spirit of anything goes, nor is it a game involving a quest for the unusual and the exotic. It points to the infinite complexity of a society, particularly if that society is drawn into a sequence of war, civil war and revolution and if over great expanses of time life is no more than a struggle for survival. The history of civilisation aims at totality; it is not the history of politics or daily life, of the reign of terror or enthusiastic approval, of culture or barbarism, but both together and much, much more—often at the same time and in the same place.[3] If we assert the idea of *histoire totale* as a desirable, albeit unachievable ideal, and if we are prepared to accept the risks implied, then for all our 'panoramic openness', we have to face up to the criteria for selection, the question of 'relevance'—in other words, the decision about what is envisaged in such a study and exactly what is to be analysed.

The present book is not a collection of essays assembled over the years, although some were written at different times. Instead the chapters listed in the table of contents represent a journey whose stages have been deliberately chosen by the author. This selection can of course never achieve encyclopedic completeness and whether it is plausible and convincing or artificial and even forced must be left to the reader to decide. I would like to have added a few more sections, had I not feared outstaying my welcome and overburdening the reader. For example, I would have liked to add chapters on the Artek camps, the summer camps for children, and examined their effects on childhood; also a chapter on the 1957 World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow. Then there is Yury Gagarin, the glorious hero. No advance commentary can take from the individual chapters what only they can do, namely provide evidence. We are reminded of the awesome statement that Walter Benjamin concealed in the gigantic corpus of his *Arcades Project*: 'Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show.'[4] A statement he was himself barely able to satisfy, having developed from the flaneur of the nineteenth century into the refugee of the twentieth.

As can be seen from the structure of the contents, this book consists of around sixty individual studies of varying length, arranged in eighteen sections. They constitute the stages of a journey undertaken between the first chapter—a stroll through one of Moscow's flea markets at the end of the Soviet Union—and the final section, that amounts to a *musée imaginaire*, a museum of Soviet civilisation situated in a memorably central location, the Lubyanka, the heart of darkness of Soviet history. One line of inquiry could take its cue from Heinrich Mann's title 'An Age under the Microscope'. Another accepts the invitation to 'read time by looking at space',[5] with the two approaches coming together in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the chronotope.[6] The different chapters address the major creations of communism, what we might call the pyramids of the twentieth century. They range from the scent of the Empire, a brand of Soviet perfume, through the meaning of–49°C for the prisoners in Kolyma and the 'Ten Days That Shook the World', to other themes in which all the senses with which we perceive the world come into play. Even if there is no point in attempting to explain the relevance of each of these themes here or justify their inclusion, it is important to explain why these particular topics were chosen. The selection is based on the author's own first-hand experience. It is not the product of current academic controversies or of any change of direction in Russian or Soviet studies.

For someone such as me, who has spent a lifetime thinking about the world of the Soviets and has had almost three decades of direct experience of the Soviet system, it has long been clear which areas should be explored and which key points probed. Hence the problem was that of the book's 'architecture', the structure to be adopted, once I had abandoned any simplistic encyclopedic or chronological organisation of the key topics. These topics included my first impressions of the period of East-West confrontation, an alien world obscured by the smokescreen of the Cold War. Then there was the world of the 1960s, when it became possible to explore the USSR by moving from one campsite to the next. This was the time of the student movements, when I was able to study the world through the seminars held at the Free University's Institute of Eastern Europe in West Berlin, where the theory of totalitarianism had been superseded by a neo-Marxist approach. It was the world of the Soviet Union and its allies, whose tanks could be seen in Prague. And lastly, it was the world of the Soviet Union in the age of glasnost and perestroika, when things that had been inconceivable until then happened. In particular there was the return of free speech and living thought to the public sphere, an almost silent historical miracle just when the world had been prepared for the very worst—Stephen Kotkin caught the spirit of the moment with the title of his book, *Armageddon Averted*.[7] All these events amounted to a stock of experiences acquired by travelling through the country, by bus, train, boat and even hitchhiking. The subjects addressed in this book are based on that foundation, on my first-hand experience and the system of coordinates developed from that, so what decided whether something was significant and worthy of analysis was not any preexisting discourse, nor any secondary material from books or the media, but my own direct perception—what I saw with my own eyes and what could serve as a basis for analysis. This book, then, deals only with places and things that I have seen for myself, whether dams, monasteries or the Costakis collection in Thessaloniki. Of particular interest were the 'common places' that Svetlana Boym first brought to the attention of academic researchers: the queues, the communal apartments, the public toilets, the parades, the large-panel prefabricated mass-housing estates and the Moscow kitchens. In each case the object concerned had a visible exterior that had been overlooked by academic researchers for decades, because they believed the search for the 'essence' or the 'system' to be more important than the description and analysis of the actual realities of life.[8]

However, it would fall short of the mark to think of the present project as no more than a personal story, a 'merely subjective' view, an account with some such title as 'My Soviet Union: Memories of a Vanished World'.

A generation that has passed through every conceivable academic controversy in 'Soviet studies' is well able to resist the fetish of 'subjective impressions' and a concept of 'direct intuition' that is as portentous as it is naïve. It was schooled in the debates around totalitarianism, 'bureaucratic degeneration' and the subtle distinctions and ramifications that have developed since the 'paradigm shift of social history'. Its members were after all the direct witnesses of the transformation of the Soviet Union itself, when the country found its own voice once more and began to get to grips with the 'blind spots' in its past.[9] If the figure of the flaneur—that is, the idea of excursion as a method—plays such a crucial role, then it is because direct experience and reflection coincide here in a way that is both unforced and compelling.

Mention must be made of a further factor that supports the methodology adopted here. The present book has profited from the revival of interest in a type of cultural history that aspires to foster an interdisciplinary approach. In Germany this approach is associated with such divergent names as Karl Lamprecht, Georg Simmel and Aby Warburg. It is built on the insight that all human socialisation expresses itself and becomes concentrated in cultural forms. This being the case, the analysis of cultural and symbolic forms—in whatever genre—must move into the focus of attention. Analysis of this kind is very different from the analysis of 'culture' conceived as a separate subsystem, comparable to the economy or politics. Instead, it aims at the concrete exploration of cultural forms involving all the disciplines that have ever succeeded in contributing to them.[10] Who could deny that eclecticism and dilettantism are a danger here, all the more so since many of the essays in this book are just opening moves which still await a systematic analysis and cultural research?

Now, having identified the experiential space and the (intersubjective and transgenerational) frame of reference for the present studies, I would like to make two important reservations.

First, the end of an empire has epistemological consequences—and the USSR is no exception. We experience a shift in our viewpoint. The academic socialisation that has put its stamp on historians of Russia and the Soviet Union—and not just on me—was, as a rule, Russocentric and focused on Moscow or Leningrad. It operated in Russian, the lingua franca of the Empire. This points to a limitation of our competence that cannot be easily rectified. Here we can only take note and bear it in mind as we proceed. That a museum tour on the postimperial periphery of the former Soviet Union would in many respects look completely different is self-evident.[11]

Second, what began with the bazaar ends—unexpectedly for me and yet with something approaching inevitability—with the collection of objects in the museum where people, natives and foreigners alike, come together because they wish to imagine the Soviet world and enter into a dialogue—mediated by the exhibits—with generations who are no longer present and can no longer speak. The idea of providing Soviet civilisation with what André Malraux called a *musée imaginaire* or Matteo Ricci a 'memory palace' turns out to be the logical form into which the present research has flowed.[12] The book is an invitation; people can follow their curiosity, inclinations, their own interests. Visitors roam around autonomously, more as if through a labyrinth than in a linear fashion. No single lesson is provided, apart from any conclusions they may reach as they review the age, the places and the objects together with their history and destinies.

CHAPTER 1

Barakholka in Izmailovsky Park, Bazaar in Petrograd

It's only a few stations on the metro from the centre of Moscow to Izmailovo. You get out at Partizanskaya and follow the signs or even just the crowds of people moving towards where everyone wants to be: the bazaar, or the *barakholka*, as the flea market used to be called in Russia even before the Revolution, the market where second-hand articles are bought and sold.[1] Following the collapse of the socialist centralised distribution system, the entire country—indeed the entire former Eastern bloc—found itself covered by a network of thousands and thousands of such bazaars and flea markets in parks, at the last stations of the underground lines, with thousands and thousands of visitors and customers. Examples are the 'Seventh Kilometre' near Odesa and the market that spread itself out in the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow. When the centralised distribution system collapsed, the value of the currency fell and a barter economy reemerged temporarily; these markets became the chief arenas for the struggle for survival, with millions of people travelling to and fro to do their shopping, shuttling back and forth like a weaver's loom, even across frontiers.[2] The bazaar in Izmailovsky Park was something special. This was because of its proximity to the city centre; in the 1930s it had been called Stalinsky Park and was Moscow's second largest park after Gorky Park, with a statue of Stalin at its entrance. It was where the Stalinsky Stadium was to be built. If it still attracts Muscovites and foreigners today, that has less to do with the magnificence of the parkland and gardens than with the attractions of this vast bazaar.

Svetlana Alexievich visited another street market and has described her walk through the Arbat in Moscow. She gives a sensitive account of how an entire world-historical era was being sold off on the cheap.

> On the Old Arbat, my beloved Arbat, I found rows of pedlars, selling *matryoshka* dolls, samovars, icons, and portraits of the last tsars and the royal family. Portraits of White Guard generals—Kolchak and Denikin, next to busts of Lenin.... There were all sorts of *matryoshkas*: Gorbachov *matryoshkas*, Yeltsin *matryoshkas*. I didn't recognize my Moscow. What city was this? Right there on the asphalt, on top of some bricks, an old man sat playing the accordion. He was wearing his medals, singing war songs, with a hat full of change at his feet. Our favourite songs ... I wanted to go up to him ... but he was already surrounded by foreigners ... snapping pictures.... They were ... having a lot of fun. Why wouldn't they be? People used to be so scared of us ... and now ... here you go! Nothing but piles of junk, an empire gone up in smoke! Next to all the *matryoshkas* and samovars there was a mountain of red flags and pennants, Party and Komsomol membership cards. And Soviet war medals! Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner. Medals![3]

There are and always have been bazaars, flea markets and street markets like this one in every town and city of the Soviet Union and what you can see there are the shards, the debris and the fragments of the world of objects belonging to the empire that has ceased to exist. There is nothing you cannot find there. Objects belonging to the world of generations long past change ownership and become the property of people living now. We witness the circulation of objectified forms and their reappropriation by others. You can find cast-iron irons that used to be heated up by charcoal and that may have come from a peasant house in the north of Russia destined to be torn down. But you can also see modern, electric irons that were perhaps handed out to the factory workers in lieu of the wages they had long since ceased to receive or which had become worthless during the 1990s. You can find individual sheets, still in good condition, of a Party newspaper, which was formerly printed in millions of copies. They have now become historical documents, thanks to the portrait of Stalin and the text of an important decree. You can find photograph albums documenting the stages of an entire life—the grandparents, the family, the pioneer years, school, the start of a working life, and perhaps even time spent in the army—in which the transition from one phase to the next is in-

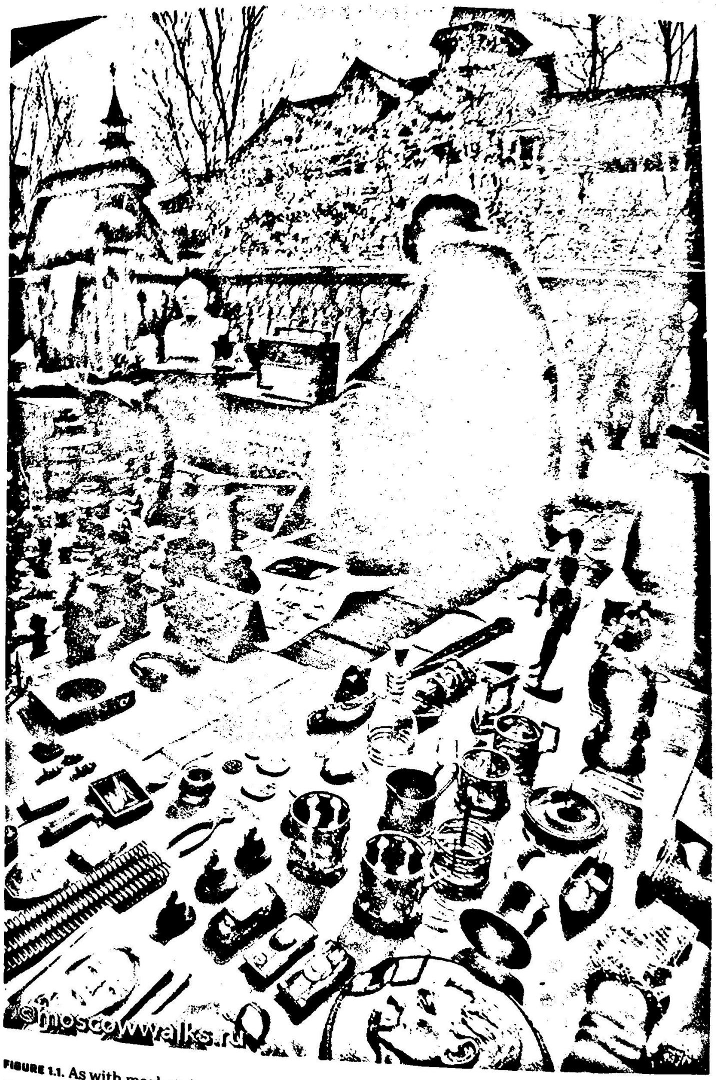

FIGURE 1.1. As with marketplaces everywhere in the world, the entire inventory of past ages is spread out on display. And so it was in a bazaar in Moscow's Izmailovsky Park in the 1990s. © moscowwalks.ru.

dicated by the transition from sepia to black and white and, in the case of a long life, to colour prints. You can find postcards from holidays on the Black Sea. Happy days! You can see them all lying there, spread out in the dust, in plastic folders, just like other kinds of documents that register the toils of a life of work, such as the 'Arbeitsbuch' containing a person's employment record, with entries in elegant handwriting recording the stages of a working life.

Sometimes, when someone has died or a household has been broken up, you find a whole bundle of documents reflecting an entire life. There are photographs enabling us to get the measure of someone's appearance and their entire trajectory—their school reports, their sporting successes, their party membership and so on right down to the end of their life. In the bazaar you can find the sort of furniture the grandchildren don't know what to do with because it is too old-fashioned, insufficiently 'modern'. Entire libraries are to be found there testifying to the taste of past generations of readers. Many of the books contain underlinings and notes in the margins. The objects up for sale are absolute compendiums of past trends and fashions. Here you can see how a young generation that wanted nothing to do with the old turned its back on the world of yesterday with its leather jackets and sailor tops. Things that had previously been carefully stored and preserved until the end of people's lives—distinctions, work records, diplomas and even medals—all find themselves up for sale in the flea market once material needs have become sufficiently pressing and the sense of reverence has evaporated. Among the post-imperial junk you can find the wall rugs that have been brought from Central Asia and the radios people could not bring themselves to discard, since they might, after all, come in handy again one day. The expert connoisseur of graphic art can barely suppress his excitement when a clueless dealer offers him a valuable print. Plunder, junk, second-hand goods, unique items—it is all testimony of one sort or another. These markets all have something of interest to bored tourists, but also to highly specialised experts. In the battered biscuit tin they discover the design of the prerevolutionary confectioners founded by Theodor Ferdinand von Einem or the Mosselprom cigarette trust of the 1920s. On the bookstall they recognise the exquisite binding of the editions of the classics published by the Academy of Sciences in the 1930s. In the chest full of hundreds of artfully designed bottles of scent, they search out the ones called 'Red Moscow' or 'Lilac Eau de Parfum'. No one can match the expertise and aesthetic judgement of the dealers offering china figurines for sale. They know the designers, the factories and the signatures on the base of each piece. In such markets you can find specialists who know all about Dresden China, about the various incarnations of the Pathé gramophone and the endless sets of matchboxes and cigarette packets. Certain notorious relics of the Stalin period, such as the book about building the White Sea Canal, edited by Maxim Gorky and illustrated by Alexander Rodchenko, are particularly costly. There are still large numbers of collectors of memorabilia from the Soviet-German War—belt buckles, pay books and service records, helmets with bullet holes, the labour records of former 'eastern workers' as well as of German soldiers who never managed to return home—all these things are readily available. Entire collections are sold en bloc, ranging from those that have been sorted out systematically to those where everything is lumped together—tea mats, stamps and coin collections (especially those of the Civil War period with their dozens of competing local currencies). In the midst of all this, you suddenly come across class photographs from 1937, the year of the Great Terror.

Today's barakholka has its predecessors.[4] We might even say that every great crisis, every revolution, the end of every era finds expression in bazaars where the shards of the vanished world are offered for sale on the cheap. 'Fragment of an Empire' is the title of a 1929 film by director Fridrikh Ermler, a masterpiece of the Soviet silent cinema.[5] A soldier in the Civil War who has lost his memory as the result of a wound regains consciousness in Leningrad, where he is unable to find his bearings. Everything has changed—the tempo, the faces, fashion and women. There are even skyscrapers to be seen (evidently the House of Industry in Kharkiv, only recently finished). The soldier wanders through the metropolis in his fur cap and peasant's coat, trying to return to the city, but finding only shards, ruins and fragments. He finally succeeds in gaining access to the factory committee, the new masters of the city, and everything ends well. Ermler has staged the great transformations wrought by the war, Revolution and Civil War by presenting them as an age of splintering and fragmentation.

The age of turmoil was also the age of the barakholka. Class distinctions disappeared from the marketplace; deprivation and the struggle for survival made everyone equal, regardless of whether they were workers, former civil servants, members of the intelligentsia or just peasants. 'Grain was the absolute standard, the hard currency throughout all the years of the Civil War.'[6] The hierarchy of values was turned upside down. Mikhail Ossorgin describes this from the standpoint of a bibliophile: 'I found a complete first edition of Lavoisier's works. Extremely rare for Moscow. And I saw a curious little book on mathematics, with ecclesiastical print, dated 1682, the first I should think, ever published in Russia. The title was curious too: *A Convenient Method of Calculation whereby any Man may conveniently discover the Number of Any Kind of Things when Buying or Selling*. There are also logarithmic tables there that go back to the time of Peter the Great.' Editions from the time of Peter and Catherine can be more cheaply obtained than the latest editions of the Imaginists.[7]

In those days too, everything ended up in the marketplace if it helped to alleviate hunger and cold. The wealth of the entire capital, doomed to disappear, was up for sale often at throwaway prices. The postrevolutionary situation was one of unlimited squandering of riches accumulated over generations: one pair of boots in exchange for ten kilos of books or one uniform in exchange for one kerosene stove. A Rubens painting that had disappeared from a palace in exchange for a loaf of bread. For connoisseurs who had not emigrated, a moment of glory had arrived. During the Civil War, St. Petersburg/Petrograd must have been the greatest street market of European art. Furniture by Abraham Roentgen, paintings by Poussin, the most venerable examples of the goldsmith's art were all to be had by anyone who could offer a bag of flour.[8] This was the place for the poorest of the poor. During the Civil War everyone went there to barter. Money had ceased to have any value. Every social class was represented and you could buy whatever you wanted: porcelain figurines, chandeliers, telescopes, cameras with Zeiss lenses, chamber pots, Underwood sewing machines, ostrich feathers, volumes of *Niva* magazine, French perfume. Barakholka Petrograd—that would be the history of a place where a city devastated by the collapse of all social relations maintains its unity, a place for trade where everything merges: buying and selling, swindling, the activities of professional thieves, the worldly expertise of art dealers, the meeting ground for everyone expelled from their habitual social roles and compelled to present themselves anew.[9]

There is plenty of testimony to the world of the open city of Petrograd with its palaces, libraries, art and painting collections, the everyday wealth that piled up in the dwellings of an affluent class. Literary reflections of the dispersal of this great wealth in the bazaars, second-hand bookshops and trading on commission can be found, for example, in Boris Pilnyak's *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*.[10] There we find two Moscow antique dealers who buy up old furniture in Kolomna, a town flooded during the building of a new dam. The antique furniture stands for the Russia that has disappeared. About the church, where the goods are all stored, we learn:

> The church looked like a pile of objects rescued from a fire. Round the walls were heaped cupboards, wardrobes, sofas and a vast number of sewing machines. . . . On a level equal to the height of three men a dinner table had been placed on two wardrobes; on it there was a chair together with a small table and a hammer for the auctioneer. Only a few people had collected in the auction room, where they were inspecting the goods, looking very business-like and loudly discussing the prices at which the bidding was to start; these, with the numbers of the lots, were posted up on the various wardrobes, beds, armchairs, sofas and sewing-machines. A dim light forced its way through the iron bars and the dust of the church windows. The professor, following the example of the others, aimlessly wandered from object to object. They were holding sales of goods that had not been redeemed from the pawnshops, sales brought on by misfortunes of every kind. Cotton cushions alongside brass bedsteads and lime wood dining-tables narrate the chronicle of Russian impoverishment.[11]

The room of the curator of the Museum of Antiquities in Kolomna is described as follows:

> In his house, somewhat like a storehouse, there lay scattered about rare bibles, stoles, albs, cassocks, chasubles, patens, veils and altar cloths of the thirteenth, fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and

> amidst this dust there reigned a naked statue of Christ in a crown of thorns, a work of the seventeenth century taken from the monastery at Bobrenev. His study was furnished with antiques which had once belonged to the landowner Karazin. On the writing-table there stood a nobleman's cap in porcelain with red trimming and white crown, which served as an ashtray.[12]

Furniture items tell their own story.

> The art of Russian mahogany furniture, started in Russia by Peter the Great, has its own legends. This art of the serfs has no written records, and time has not deemed it necessary to preserve the names of its masters. It has always been the work of individual and known men, in cellars in the towns, in small backrooms in the country, a work of bitter vodka and cruel solitude. Georges Jacob and André Charles Boulle, the French master cabinet makers, were their inspiration.
>
> Young serfs were sent to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Paris and Vienna; there they were taught the craft. Then they were brought back from Paris to the cellars of St. Petersburg and Moscow, from St. Petersburg to small serfs' quarters on the estates, and there they created. For decades one of them would be employed in making a couch, a dressing-table, some small bureau or book-case; he worked, drank and died, leaving his art to his nephews, for a master was not supposed to have children, and the nephews either carried on their uncle's art or copied it. The master died, but what he created lived on in landowners' estates and private houses. People made love and died in their beds . . . in the secret drawers of the secretaries clandestine correspondence was kept; in the mirrors on the dressing tables brides gazed on their youth, old women on their age. Elizabeth, Catherine—rococo, baroque, bronze scrolls, fleurons, mahogany, ebony, rosewood, satinwood, Persian nut. . . . Under Paul it is a soldier's life with a soldier's Freemasonry, a calm severity. The mahogany is overlaid with a dark lacquer, there is green leather and griffons and black lions. Under Alexander I it is all Empire style, Classical and Greek. . . . This was how the spirit of the times was mirrored in the joiner's craft.[13]

Later on, too, the barakholka remained a fixture in everyday Soviet life. From time to time, it would be banned and it was always subject to controls and bureaucratic interference, but remained irreplaceable as a counter to the failings of the planned economy. The economist V. V. Sher thought of the Moscow bazaar as the rebirth of capitalism. 'The Sukharevka is conquering Red Square in the name of transforming the whole of Moscow into a New York or Chicago.'[14] In 1936 Moscow also had the Yaroslavsky and Dubininsky bazaars where you could buy rubber galoshes, shoes, off-the-peg clothes, gramophone records, and more. The bazaars of the 1930s and 1940s existed side by side with the state shops.[15] In the 1940s, Aleksander Wat, the Polish writer banished to Alma-Ata [now Almaty] after the occupation of eastern Poland, wrote about the Tolkuchka bazaar:

> I had to walk across the flea market, which played a certain role in my life, and so maybe I should describe it a little. An enormous square, perhaps as large as Red Square. By day it was Sodom and Gomorrah, a whirlwind of rags and people. Colorful. You could buy anything there. Nails, one rubber boot at a time, but there were also very substantial items—gold. They all held onto their goods for dear life. They slung them over their arms or held them in their hands, or the entire family would barricade them because urks cruised the market. And policemen too. It should be said that while in Russia the NKVD was a menace, the police were mostly undernourished and very anaemic, like sleepy flies in the late autumn. They hung around the market. Incredible shouting in twenty languages, dialects. That was by day.[16]

The flea markets and black markets were places that enabled people to survive, especially in the towns ravaged by war in the west of the Soviet Union before state supplies had been properly restored. According to Yury Nagibin, what you could find in the barakholka in postwar Moscow were old shoes, used clothing, soldiers' overcoats, splendid furs, gold rings and antiques—from balalaikas without strings to accordions, pistols, medals, forged documents, padded jackets, priests' robes, Brussels lace and American summer suits—in fact everything under the sun.[17] These markets acquired a rather different meaning during the Thaw and the late Soviet phase. The Thaw generation did away with the furniture of the 1930s and 1940s—it had put behind it the fears and basic privations of the Revolution and the industrialisation phase. It discarded the cumbersome furniture that looked out of place in the new, modern homes; it threw out the complete works of Marxism-Leninism, while retaining the children's books by Korney Chukovsky and Arkady Gaidar, the Academy editions of the Russian classics and the great cookery book from the Stalin era. In the 1960s the 'organs of the state' took a harsher view of the flea markets because they saw in them a biotope for speculators, currency dealers and *fartsovshchiki* [illegal traffickers].[18]

However, the most serious clearing-out campaign took place at the end of the Soviet Union. The clear-out of the past became a paroxysm of hysteria, for a brief period at least. People could not rid themselves fast enough of the furniture, clothes and books of the Soviet era. But this phase is over and done with. Today the barakholka is fast disappearing from the post-Soviet consumer landscape with its super-malls, shopping centres with carparks and logistics complexes. What survives in the barakholka is what is unobtainable in the expensive modern consumer world focused on the latest fashions, namely the shards of empire.

CHAPTER 2

The Soviet World as Museum

Museum visits were not normally the top priority of visitors to the Soviet Union or Russia. Of course, there were always highlights and still are, places that were required viewing and could not be omitted: the art collections, first and foremost the Hermitage and the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg or the Tretyakov Gallery and the Armoury Palace in the Kremlin in Moscow. But how many people find themselves in the Railway Museum in St. Petersburg or the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum in Moscow, not to mention the many museums with impressively large collections that might be inspected outside the two Russian metropolises?[1] These collections are sought out by experts who know that important works of art belonging to Soviet Modernism can also be found outside the capital and in the so-called provinces: in Samara on the Volga or in Novosibirsk. They had been sent there once upon a time by a People's Commissariat for Enlightenment that believed in the idea of education and the principle of just redistribution and decentralisation of cultural goods. This is how masterpieces by Boris Kustodiev or Kazimir Malevich can still be found in remote locations where no one would ever expect to find them.[2]

But the world of museums is not confined to art. Museums are far more than that, as can be seen from what has become a vast literature on the subject.[3] They are storehouses of cultural memory, for both major events and minor details; memories of families, tribes, nations, empires and enterprises. Their exhibits and the way they are presented enable us to imagine time—both time past and the time in which we live. This is how a nation or a city wishes to be seen. This is the self-image that one wants sent out into the world or at least anchored in visitors' minds. Museums resemble time capsules or time machines. They may take the form of cabinets of curiosities, glassed-in galleries complete with dust and spiders' webs or else modern high-tech museums with moving images, audio guides and the production of sound worlds that catapult visitors to other places or other times in an 'interactive' relation to generations long since extinct. Museums can be structured strictly chronologically so that visitors follow what might be termed an arrow of time. Such exhibitions have an order of their own, much like that of old-time school textbooks, so that whoever follows the narrative line cannot really go astray. They follow the red thread and at the end of the trail, having successfully negotiated all the vicissitudes and dangers, arrive at an end point, which is indispensable in any historical narrative. Such a narrative needs an end, a goal, a telos, which admittedly varies. It may be an end with a clear message, a 'lesson', or else one full of contradictory information or interpretations, leaving visitors confused—as after a rollercoaster ride.

At the heart of the museum, we find the collector and the collection. Prolonged periods of peace are beneficial for the labour of accumulation, while disruptions, with their uncertainties and iconoclastic outbursts, can lead to irreversible losses. Museums put objects on display—the heritage of humankind—but they never do so without the desire and the intention to display something of themselves. The exhibition of the material legacy of the past in its thousand different forms has its own history, as we well know. For that reason, however 'dry and dusty', however 'permanent' they seem, museums are true likenesses and barometers of time.[4] Every exhibition and every change in the course of events is significant—one way or another. They proclaim that an alteration has taken place, a revision, a revaluation or a change of perspective. This can be seen very dramatically following the end of the Soviet Empire and the construction of national museums in the 'post-Soviet space'. The history of museums in the 'Time of Troubles' of the 1990s and the process of de-Sovietisation has still to be written. There is much to be said here about the partial collapse of the security systems, the boom in smuggling antiquities and works of art, and the fact that the life's work of an entire generation of museum professionals, curators and restorers was threatened and in many instances ruined. But we should also raise a monument to the dedication, bravery and indeed heroism displayed by these 'servants of culture'—not for the first time in history—in the defence of 'their' museums. Think of the courage and persistence with which the staff of the National Art Museum doggedly defended the museum round the clock for weeks on end amid the battles on the Maidan. Think of the numerous movements that sprang up to prevent secularised churches that had been converted into museums from being returned to the Russian Orthodox Church, one case in point being St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg.[5]

Museum Empire: Lifeworlds of the Empire

Those who have familiarised themselves with the world of museums during decades of travel here, there and everywhere in the Soviet Union and taken the trouble to reflect on the importance of 'seeing with one's own eyes' to understand history will have become something of experts on museums, whether by design or not.[6] There is a simple but cogent explanation for this. During the Soviet era, when these central institutions of knowledge and information were on hand and accessible, visiting museums was a simple necessity. The local and regional museums were the most important places to discover information about a particular location. This was particularly so for foreign visitors, but also more generally in a country where literature on local history was in short supply or totally absent. Bookshops had little to offer—in many you could not even find a local town plan. Even when publications on aspects of local history existed, they quickly went out of print since they became instant rarities that had appeared in minieditions of between one hundred and five hundred copies as part of an under-the-counter literature, unavailable for the most part in the large municipal or university libraries. Another indispensable method of familiarising oneself with what Italo Calvino called 'the invisible cities' was to visit the cemeteries, insofar as they still existed and had not been levelled in favour of new roads, stadiums or culture parks.

The museums repeatedly visited did not just serve to provide local information but stood for a kind of museum culture, which has almost died out in Western countries and, notwithstanding all the Soviet rhetoric about progress, has a lot to do with the traditional idea of museums as places of education and culture that prevailed in the nineteenth century. This becomes very clear in the museums of local

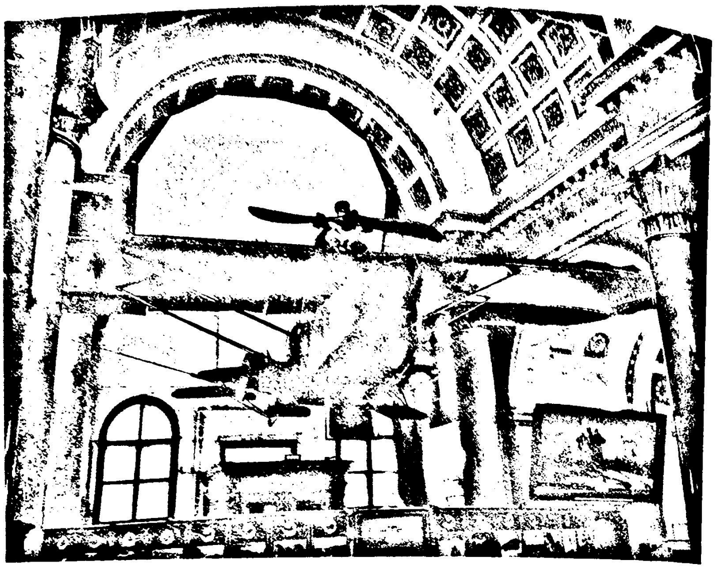

FIGURE 2.1. The conquest of the North Pole by Soviet pilots can be seen in the Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic that was installed in the former St. Nicholas Church in St. Petersburg in 1937. © Martin Jeske, Basel.

and regional history outside the large towns (*istoricheskie i kraevedcheskie muzei*), that is, in the ancient Russian towns lying outside the more recent metropolises, such as Dmitrov, Tver and Yaroslavl. Opening up the cultural landscape defined by a river, the Volga region, for example, was (and is) unthinkable without visits to the well-stocked museums of Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov, Samara or Astrakhan. Simply reading the inscriptions in museums of the non-Russian metropolises such as Tbilisi, Tashkent, Yerevan, Kyiv and Riga taught you very quickly that the Soviet Union was a state with many languages and alphabets. How could you begin to understand something of the force of the modernisation process in the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union without a visit to the museums of such industrial towns as Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Donetsk, Yekaterinburg? In the period of perestroika, the regional museums were frequently the first port of call for information about the local impact of the Great Terror, the

opening-up of mass graves and the camps. In short, museum visits played a preeminent, indeed irreplaceable role in a country that for a long period had fallen out of the 'Age of Gutenberg' with its production of publications that were always universally accessible. Up to now, there has been to my knowledge no analysis of the uncommonly rich and multifaceted museum landscape of the former USSR.[7]

One is overwhelmed not simply by the number of large, medium and small museums, but also by their range, which covers the infinite variety and wealth of the Soviet or Russian world. The regional collections introduce you in a classical interdisciplinary—one is tempted to use the old-fashioned term 'holistic'—manner to the development of a region, starting with a description of its natural space and the classical questions about its geology, geography, botany, flora and fauna, right down to the events of the present day. But alongside these museums with a local focus to be found in most larger places, you can also find magnificent permanent exhibitions, dedicated to such topics as the conquest of the Arctic and Antarctic (in Leningrad/St. Petersburg), the history of the railways in the Russian Empire (St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, among others), the history of the theatre (the Bakhrushin Museum in Moscow); numerous museums of architecture and town planning; museums of river boats and barge traffic (Nizhny Novgorod, Rybinsk); and memorials and museums of Soviet despotism (Solovki, Medvezhyegorsk on the White Sea Canal). More recently, we have seen the emergence of museums that following independence in 1991 were set up to break radically with their predecessors (the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga, the Genocide Museum in Vilnius). An important role is played by all the museums, memorials and dioramas relating to the Great Patriotic War (dioramas in Sevastopol, Volgograd, Rzhev, as well as in Independent Ukraine in Dnipro and Kyiv). War—including recent wars such as those in Afghanistan or Chechnya—is a fixture of all museums, with monuments and memorials often shown as a background to important events of personal life, such as photos of the first day at school or at weddings.[8] A further unusual feature is the number of museums dedicated to enlightenment or atheism, both associated with the aggressively anticlerical policy of the Bolsheviks and the Godless movement of the 1930s. This was given visual expression in the exhibition of relics and Foucault's pendulum, which was suspended above the paving in the centre of Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad. A type of museum that in my experience is far less common in other cultures are the so-called apartment museums (*muzei-kvartiry*), museums located in the former dwellings of famous people such as Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Alexander Blok, Rimsky-Korsakov, Dmitry Mendeleev, Ivan Pavlov and others—places they lived in either permanently or for a limited period. In the Soviet era there were many museums devoted to the 'life and works' of representatives of the state and Party leadership—Lenin, Kirov, Lunacharsky, and so forth. A similar genre features the 'lifeworlds' of the nobility, the country mansions—the homes of the nobility that managed to survive the waves of plundering, arson or else systematic destruction and demolition after 1917 and as a result of the Soviet-German War.

Looked at from the bird's-eye view of the historian, the Soviet space still seems to be infinitely homogenised and uniform. But to do justice to the 'Soviet Union' you really need an 'on-site' inspection. Once there, you see that despite all the unifying and the censorship, you have the vast variety of a great country that simply cannot be fitted into a 'short course'.

A Linear History of Progress and the Magic of Shop Windows

Museums of the Soviet type—but not only them—followed a simple, plausible narrative, if we may be allowed such generalisations. It is the (Marxist) history of progress, advancing step by step from the origins of the world and on to flora and fauna, the Stone Age, primitive society, slave-owning society, feudalism, capitalism, the workers' movement and socialism. This is a simple chronological system; it is as informative as a school lesson and quite comprehensive. Visitors learn a lot—or find themselves reminded of what they once knew when in high school. The arrangement of the exhibits provides a firm framework. This linear approach is of course intentional, carefully constructed and linked to an ideological interpretation and a specific educational thrust.

Just what a narrative about the Soviet museum might look like was not apparent initially. Its genesis was a highly conflicted process which reflected the Soviet power's struggles to establish its relation to history. It took a while for a kind of standard narrative to crystallise. 'Vladimir Ilyich was no great lover of museums,' his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya tells us.[9] The issue was not Lenin's personal opinion but the question of the role of museums in the new society and how they could become places that would guarantee a continuity of knowledge and tradition that transcended the rupture created by the Revolution. There was no more than a decade between the radical critique of museums as an outmoded and obsolete institution, as asserted by Kazimir Malevich, for example, and the emergence of a new pedagogical institution based on dialectical materialism, but this decade was marked by a debate still topical and relevant today. This can be seen from the list of people who expressed their views on the subject of revolution and the museum: Kazimir Malevich, Alexander Rodchenko, Osip Brik, Andrey Platonov and Pavel Florensky spoke up on behalf of the avant-garde, while philosophers and art critics of the Stalin period included Ivan Luppol and Alexey Fyodorov-Davidov; as an invisible third party and theoretical reference point, there was the philosopher Nikolay Fyodorov, whose chief work *The Common Cause* was concerned with establishing a relation between the generations, between the living and the dead and ultimately with resurrection.[10] Michael Hagemeister summarises Fyodorov's position as follows: 'The museum is no shop full of dead objects, but the place where the dead are remembered through artefacts of all kinds (including books)—where they are recalled to life, if only in the mind initially. Thus the museum serves the purpose of overcoming death and making mortals immortal.' In Fyodorov's own words, 'the museum is no collection of things but an assemblage of persons; its activity is not to pile up dead things but to return to life the remains of those who have passed away; its purpose is to enable the active living to deploy the products of those who have died so as to restore them to life once again.'[11] For anyone who has had anything to do with the 'mature' museums of the late phase of the Soviet Union, it is difficult to recall to mind the radical interrogations, at once inspirational and irritating, of the early period of Soviet museum discourse.

From the 1930s, with the ascendancy of Stalin's 'Short Course', the narrative was fixed for decades to come. Whatever did not fit in with the history of progress was simply omitted or else 'transcended' in the course of dialectical movement. Specific phases or events of history are entirely absent: the cruel behaviour of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, the Holodomor famine in Ukraine during the period of collectivisation and industrialisation, the repression of the nationalities, the nonheroic side of the Great Patriotic War with its horrendous sacrifices.

The difficulties experienced by museums in producing a new, non-ideological and myth-free narrative since the end of the Soviet history of progress can be seen in many of the museums of the republics that have (once again) regained their independence. In the National Museum of Tbilisi, for example, the period 1920–1991 is represented without exception as the 'Period of Occupation', just as if the Soviet Republic of Georgia were simply and solely an occupied territory—without its own Soviet modernisation drive and without any pride in 'Stalin, the greatest son of the Georgian people'.

It is not easy to explain why Soviet museum culture should also be seen as an achievement sui generis, when we consider the prescribed images of history, the modelling of the past on political events and the shameless falsifications. Nevertheless, the museums are more than just mere indoctrination and propaganda institutions. They are also the meeting point of traditions that have more in common with the nineteenth century, with the belief in the 'spirit of Enlightenment' and the 'betterment of humanity through education and culture' than with the utopian project of communism.

The Soviet-Russian museum merits a phenomenological study, a 'thick' description that would bring many things together—the location: often splendid old urban villas, palaces of the nobility or else churches; the rituals involved in the cumbersome production of the entry ticket; the cloakroom procedures; the stern looks of the museum attendants, frequently older women; and the feeling of loneliness unless a class of children happens to be on a school visit.

Among the stand-out characteristics of the Soviet museum, we note its insistence on the concrete nature of material objects—whether stuffed bears, clay pots or an issue of a prerevolutionary underground newspaper. Museums the world over have objects on display. But Soviet museums did not yet have sequences of rapidly changing images, interactive screens, play stations and machines with which to distract onlookers. Given their educational function with its doctrinaire narrowness and imposed limitations, they remained places of learning. To a greater degree than elsewhere, they remained pedagogical and moral institutions. Visitors were not left to their own devices but taken by the hand and gently guided. It was not the individual who moved through the exhibition rooms but the escorted group that wanted and was supposed to learn something. The outing was packed full of information that no one could retain, even though some people took notes. It was an intensive study experience that called for great self-discipline.

A further feature of Soviet museums was the wish to make visible the 'spirit of the age' or of a particular milieu.[12] The effort to re-create the appropriate atmosphere, dismissed by postmodernists as naïve, is still impressive today, where it has survived. It cannot be achieved without an emphasis on style, stereotypes and clichés. We can even speak of a regular stylistic canon of 'the spirit of the ages'. Whatever museum you visited between Brest and Vladivostok, there was always a particular interior with wallpaper, a piano and Art Nouveau lamps that stood for the world of the Russian intelligentsia. Another setting—glassed-in veranda, chandelier, Empire furnishings with antimacassars—stood for the nesting place of the Russian nobility, while yet another stood for the world of the merchant—frequently the alcove with an icon or private chapel. We could almost draw up a list of the objects belonging to the programme: Thonet bentwood chairs, Mercedes or Underwood typewriter, Singer sewing machine, the metal-framed bed standing for the asceticism of revolutionary youth. The typology and image worlds of sociocultural milieus took many decades to become established and be passed from one generation to the next. There was no sensational original to form the centrepiece but instead you had to create as close an image as possible to an atmospherically accurate, convincingly colourful staging of the kind of world familiar from Russian novels, the photo albums of past generations or posters that have become iconic. These stagings revealed an astoundingly secure sense of style and, significantly, were more compelling in their reconstruction of bourgeois milieus than of the world of the proletariat.[13]

Reading History Anew

The dissolution of empires is always something of a happy catastrophe. With all their uncertainties and instabilities, they are a threat to such sensitive institutions as museums with their dependence on order and their need to grow over many generations. On the other hand, the ends of eras are a great opportunity because we can make a fresh start, the museum cosmos can be rearranged, stories can be told that were never told before, new narratives can be formulated, new objects retrieved from the warehouse and new pathways developed. A 'change of decor' in a literal sense.[14]

Rethinking and reinterpreting a nation's entire history can be one of the most exciting events in its intellectual life. Such processes of seeing things anew and reevaluating them are risky, full of potential conflicts that may result in the formation of new mythologies and ideologies. At stake is the discovery and visualisation of topics that were hitherto taboo even though they embodied life experiences of central importance. They inevitably lead to a greater animation of the museum scene and the museums themselves move out of the quiet realm of educational institutions into the centre of public debate. They become the contested sites of new orientations, the battleground to determine who has the right to lay down the law. As a rule, provincial museums followed the lead taken in the capital—on historical matters too—but with a certain time lag. This doesn't always happen. Their very distance from the public life of the capital enables curators and museum directors to put their own projects and ideas into effect—usually emphasising the 'special nature' of local and regional conditions and drawing on treasures that have long lain around in warehouses. This means that there is no exhibition on 'collectivisation' or 'the' Great Terror, but there will be something on the collectivisation of the peasantry or the Terror aimed at particular regional elites, based on local sources, testimony and archives. This is the concrete nature of materials on the spot that then trickle into the wider discourse, transforming it in the medium and longer term. The ability of the supercentralised state to force everything into line with its 'vertical lines of power' is immense, but it is childish to imagine that in a country as vast as Russia historical knowledge and concrete memories can be totally controlled and coerced into a particular philosophical direction. Furthermore, the internet has now joined up the remotest Russian 'province' with the centres of global culture. (Think of the young curators in the year 2000, who sat with their laptops discussing a joint exhibition with colleagues in Rotterdam and New York from a 1930s seaplane hangar on the Solovetsky Islands in the White Sea.)

Exhibitions can play a key role in changing people's historical consciousness of themselves. They can act as veritable turning points just as much as new openings can. This is how it was with the exhibition *Ten Years Khrushchev* on Komsomolsky Prospekt in Moscow during the perestroika period in the mid-1980s, when the public was visibly shaken to find itself confronted with the experiences of its own generation for the first time: with life in the *kommunalka*, that is, communal apartments; with the return of the inmates from the Gulag after Stalin's death; with the USA Exhibition, the World Youth Festival of 1957 and Christian Dior's fashion show put on display by models on Red Square. Visitors discovered their own world here; for the first time, the 'banality of everyday life' had become the subject of an exhibition, in contrast to earlier presentations which consisted exclusively of peak performances, records in fulfilling the plan and heroic deeds. Visitors were moved to tears, recognising themselves and their own age and finding themselves recognised: it was a moment of self-perception and self-enlightenment. Another example was the exhibition coorganised by the photographer Yury Brodsky on the grounds of the Solovetsky Monastery. For the first time, the history of the camp-archipelago was represented there, with constant references to the traces of the camp that were still visible at the beginning of the 1990s—the quay where the boats arrived with their prisoners, the church rooms that had been converted for use as prison cells, the canals and workshops built by the prisoners, and the decaying churches on the islands in which the political prisoners were locked up.[15] One new initiative was the exhibition of Soviet underwear in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. This exhibition was concerned with fashion, but above all with the relation of Soviet men and women to their bodies, the relation of private to public—a subject for which there had been no room in a history of prudish, official Soviet high culture.[16] It is almost always the stupendous materiality of such exhibits that creates their powerful effect—the Primus stoves in the Soviet kitchen, the transistor radio from the Riga factory, the pattern on the Azerbaijani wall rugs and the encounter with a now vanished lifeworld.

Historical events are played out in space as well as in time. History happens in a place; history takes place. Not for nothing do we speak of the genius loci, the magic (or curse) of a place to which a historical event becomes attached and which becomes a point of mediation between the living and the dead, between different generations, in their virtual conversation: so this is where it all happened!

Cities are marked by historical events, either because those events have left physical traces—bullet holes or ruins, for example—or else by being imagined as authentic historical backdrops. These physical or symbolic topographies can be revealed, made visible or decoded. The historical events of different epochs overlay one another like a palimpsest in which layers of meaning are superimposed. The Soviet practice of *memorialnaya doska*, the commemorative plaque that reminds us of important contemporaries, was, like the museum, a way of making 'history' visible: 'Here lived and worked the outstanding artist of the people . . .' However, the uniform nature of these plaques, which are ubiquitous throughout the Soviet Union, points to the fact that an elaborate system lay behind them, from the commission that awarded the distinction down to the design that is supposed to attract attention and survive for all eternity in defiance of wind and weather. Plaques for poets, scholars, Party leaders, war heroes, tank and aircraft manufacturers, 'outstanding male and female artists of the people', theatre people, composers, engineers and top workers—the list includes both geniuses and officials no one remembers anymore; executioners and their victims. Cities such as Moscow and Leningrad were (and still are) punctuated by these plaques, by the symbolic presence and celebration of people who were significant or honoured as such. No less illuminating is the identity of those who were not

thought worthy or whose names were expunged at a particular point in time. Putting the two groups together would provide a landscape both fascinating and shocking. In many cases, it would be the starting point for dramatic accounts of people's lives and deaths in exceptional times. We need only consider the plaques on the façade of the Hotel Metropol, that Art Nouveau luxury liner on Theatre Square in the centre of Moscow. We see there (by no means all) the names of the members of the first Soviet government, prominent visitors from everywhere in the world on their passage through Moscow, fellow travellers from every country. Or the plaques on the legendary House on the Embankment, the almost American-looking compound built in the 1930s for the Party and government elite. Just as victims and perpetrators had often lived together on the same floor, so now they appear side by side in plaques on the wall of the building. An analysis of these commemorative plaques would probably amount to a history of the selective appreciation of some residents together with a silence that speaks volumes about the deviationists, renegades and nonconformists, and especially of the many who remain nameless. To restore names and dates to those intentionally forgotten, to make visible their fate and the theatre of their lives, is one of the great tasks of the activists of 'Memorial'. They have begun—motivated possibly by the 'stumbling stone' movement in Germany—to put plaques with the inscription 'The Last Address' on the dwellings of the people who disappeared in the Terror. By doing so, they have opened a new chapter in the memory culture of the post-Soviet era.

The territory of the former Soviet Union bears the scars of mass suffering from the storms of violence that have passed over it. We might speak of a commemorative landscape of death and survival to which every age and every generation has contributed its share.[17] It is possible to take a virtual journey through the world of the Soviet camps, but also an actual journey.[18] These include places of mass execution by the NKVD [the secret police] and the Gulag: the forest of the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery or the Kresty Prison in Leningrad, the clearing near Sandarmokh in the zone along the White Sea Canal, the firing-squad sites and mass graves in Butovo and Kommunarka in southwest Moscow, Bykivnia near Kyiv and many others. Alongside these, a number of other commemorative sites could only obtain

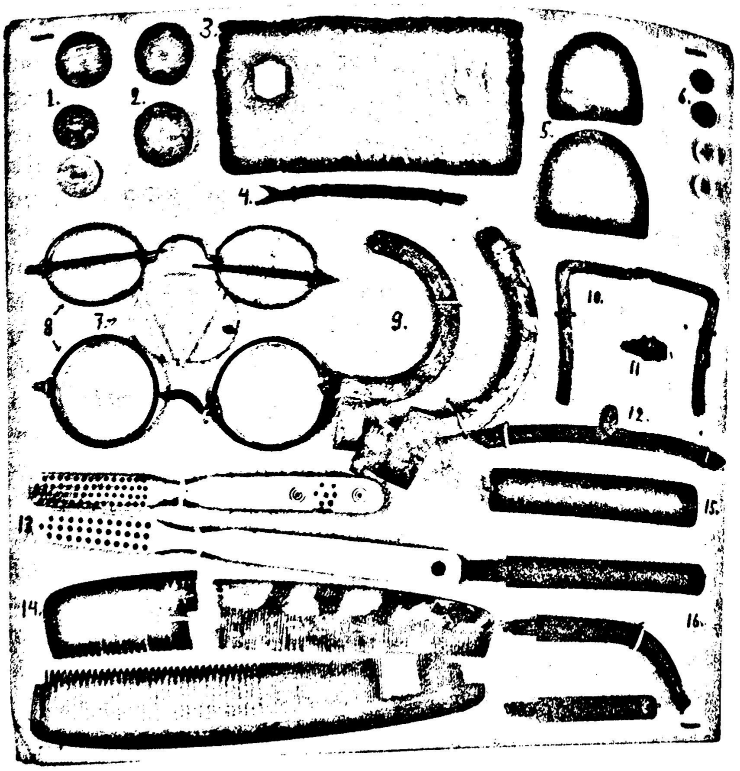

FIGURE 2.2. Vestiges and traces of violence. In the perestroika period, there were almost daily announcements about discoveries and excavations in places where spectacle frames, boots, buckles, cartridge cases and smashed skulls were found. This picture shows finds from a mass grave from the 1930s in Dubovka near Voronezh. © GULAG Archives/Tomasz Kizny.

public recognition in the course of perestroika and after the demise of the Soviet Union. Examples are the memory of victims on both sides in the Civil War, the victims of collectivisation, the deportation of ethnic groups or the mass murder of Polish officers in the Forest of Katyn, in Mednoye near Tver and in Kharkiv. Many of these memorial sites from the period following the end of the Soviet Union are most impressive; visitors fall silent at the sight of them. Family members of the victims often travel great distances to visit and nail a letter or a photo to a tree because the exact location of their grave is unknown.

With the addition of a brief inscription, a bare stone, one just lying around, seems to be the main form of commemoration—as is the case with the boulders from Solovki on Lubyanka Square in Moscow and in Troitskaya Square in St. Petersburg.[19] Travellers, especially if from Germany, also find themselves discovering another quite different topography of violence, namely the ubiquitous traces of the German war of annihilation on the soil of the former Soviet Union; the sites of the massacres of the Jews—Babi Yar in Kyiv, Botanichesky Sad in Dnipro, Drobytsky Yar and the tractor factory in Kharkiv, Odesa and Kamianets-Podilskyi, the obelisk on the site of the former ghetto in the centre of Minsk, the memorials to the massacres of Rumbula and Bikernieki near Riga, the Klooga concentration camp in Estonia—the sites of prison camps and the execution of partisans, of the mass deaths in besieged Leningrad. There is scarcely a village without an obelisk or a grave.[20]

It was not just because of the Soviet Union's ideological claim to be the 'Workers' Fatherland' that political attention was concentrated on the world of work and the world of the working class. This claim flowed naturally from the fact that it was an agrarian country developing into an industrial one. Factories and businesses were focal points around which life was organised—not unlike the situation in Western Europe during the phase of industrialisation. The factory environment included the workplace, provision for the works canteen (*stolovaya*, *fabrika-kukhnya*), the allocation of living rooms, school and further education, the system of evening schools and company schools, as well as the palaces of culture belonging to the company and financed by it, the system of health resorts and sanatoriums vital to the structure of holidays. The life of the population revolved around the factories—not unlike the company towns in North America, in which the life even of larger towns was organised around the enterprise, as was the case with US Steel in Gary, Indiana, and General Motors in Detroit. All of this helps to explain the particular importance of the factory and works museums that were set up from the early days of the Revolution and subsequently expanded and maintained at considerable cost. They are to be found in almost all larger factories and sometimes also in smaller ones, including the legendary Putilov Works and the Baltic Shipyard in Leningrad, AMO or ZIL in

Moscow, the car plant in Gorky, and the tractor factories in Chelyabinsk, Stalingrad and elsewhere. They opened access to the history of industrialisation beyond knowledge of a particular factory and paid heed to the world of every day, the lifeworld. In these museums you can read almost the entire history from the exhibits: the origins of the great factories, stretching back into the nineteenth century and frequently financed by foreign investors; the emergence of the Russian workers' movement; the growth of technology and production methods that become increasingly independent of foreign influences; the disruptions to industry arising from the Great Terror, the effects of the war, and finally, the postwar reconstruction. The cars in the works museum in Gorky/Nizhny Novgorod illustrate the history of the Soviet motor industry. The history of construction gives us an insight into the development of industrial architecture, engineering and technology; the account of living conditions clarifies the transition from communism to the consumerism of the post-Stalin era. The histories of factories and industrial plants have never been so professionally reconstructed and put on museum display as in the former Soviet Union (presumably, the industrial museums in Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds offer the closest comparison).[21]

Museums of this type are accompanied by a specific scientific and literary genre: the works history, biographies of outstanding builders, engineers, top workers or sportsmen who have made their way from the workbench to a gold medal in boxing or weightlifting. It was no less a figure than Maxim Gorky, the most prominent Soviet writer, who promoted this genre with the assistance of a publishing house he helped to launch: Zemlya i Fabrika (Country and Factory). Together with the works' archives, the works museums await the day when they shall all be opened for a microhistory of Soviet industrialisation.

Nikolay Pavlovich Antsiferov: Material Culture, Excursion as Method

Works histories and works museums did not emerge spontaneously but developed on an elaborate theoretical foundation under the heading of *Muzeologiya*, *Kraevedenie* (regional studies) and *Gradovedenie* (urban studies). Nikolay Antsiferov (1889–1958) seems to me to be a key figure in this context. He wrote a book legendary in its day—*The Soul of St. Petersburg* (1922)—that has appeared in a large number of reprints and new editions since the end of the Soviet Union.[22] Antsiferov, himself a pupil of Ivan Mikhailovich Greaves, a specialist in ancient history and Italian urban culture, played a leading role in developing a method known as excursionism (*ekskursionistika*, *ekskursologiya*), which entered Soviet museum science and historiography and became a dominant influence in the genre of the Soviet excursion. The idea was that once the palaces of the aristocracy had been opened to the public and once private libraries and galleries had become generally available, the population as a whole should be granted access to the world of the ruling class. 'Museums of material culture' sprang up everywhere, showcasing the domestic interiors and lifestyle of class society. Visitors were supposed to gain a vivid insight into social and cultural living conditions from inspecting the places where people actually lived.[23] Antsiferov and his school were convinced that you needed a concrete view, that you must 'experience' a city by touring around in it. Regional and national studies were rigorously planned with this in mind. We are dealing with a 'history from below' avant la lettre, with a trend that anticipates the Western 'history workshops' and the 'museums of everyday culture'. Antsiferov shows himself to be a contemporary of a Franz Hessel, who developed the art of taking a walk in Berlin, or of a Walter Benjamin, who made the flaneur a central figure of his historical hermeneutics.[24] Like the entire trend of national and regional history, Antsiferov's school fell under the wheels of Stalinist repression and was caught up in the increasingly dogmatic approach to historiography of the later 1920s/early 1930s. More than a few representatives of Kraevedenie and Gradovedenie were murdered.[25] The Antsiferov tradition lived on in the underground and in the circles of nonacademic historians, who collected materials, traces, pictures, eyewitness accounts and maps, but could find no salaried posts among officially approved historians. The history of marginalised historians, who made a crucial contribution to the survival of a critical tradition, is rich in stories of persecution and victimhood, but has yet to be written. The fact that they were compelled on occasion to defend themselves from accusations of dilettantism and lack of professionalism tells us something not only about the self-assurance of academic historiography, but also about the failure to understand even today the enormous contribution of so-called hobby historians to the development of a vital way of thinking on the margins of Soviet society.

Search for Identity: Between the Urge to Throw Things Out and the Creation of New Myths

A quarter of a century after the demise of the Soviet Union, museums have become contested spaces. The freedom that had opened for museums brought movement into the museum landscape, which had seemed ossified hitherto. A plethora of exhibitions appeared everywhere, with an emphasis on 'small-scale history'. Things that had lain mouldering in depots were now put on show.[26] There was no sense of direction or a unified script for a post-Soviet narrative. What some regarded as unprecedented freedom, others experienced as a dangerous vacuum. It seemed easier to fill this vacuum in the non-Russian republics, since the newly recovered history of the nation offered itself as a substitute for history imposed by 'the Russians'. All the mistakes and tragedies could now be laid at their door, while the Russians themselves were left alone with their Soviet heritage.[27] In the 1990s the project of a post-Soviet Russian identity was everywhere proclaimed. Since then, even the 1990s have become history and are themselves the object of historicising and moralising, initially on paper and then, at some point, in reality. 'The museum of the 1990s is the terrain of liberty.'[28]

But the phase of seeking, of self-discovery, of the plurality of historical interpretations inaugurated by perestroika ended a decade later in a new historical turn, imposed in a clampdown by the new leadership and introduced step by step. Its results can be followed in school textbooks, TV series, popular literature and the erection of monuments. They also impinge on museums that received enormous subsidies for modernisation during the oil and gas boom of the affluent 2000s. Everything now was high tech instead of old-fashioned glass display cases, and video installations instead of staged live scenes. More concerning was the ideological and political turn which privileged the celebration of the Russian state, the greatness of the Empire, and the spiritual superiority of the Russian world, above all the Russian Orthodox world, in contrast to other cultures. The familiar early nineteenth-century formula rooted in the trinity of autocracy, orthodoxy and populism was now tailored to the needs of the twenty-first century.

This soon showed itself in the way museum display rooms and exhibitions were reconfigured or newly conceived. Whole thematic complexes or historical periods were simply phased out, eliminated from the permanent displays and banished to the cellars. Nowadays, the Tsarist Empire basks in a nostalgic halo, while the histories of the Revolution and the Civil War are consigned to the rubbish heap. In the local museum in Rybinsk, for example, they have been stored in the building of the old Corn Exchange, directly on the Volga where an entire era—'Building Socialism' in the 1920s and 1930s—has disappeared for the time being and been replaced by portraits of the Tsars and an exhibition on the relations between the Romanovs and the city's merchants. This process of reorganisation frequently involves not just a new exhibition concept, but also the existence and definition of the very museum buildings themselves. Holdings that form part of the core stock of a museum—such as the icon collections—are to be returned to the churches from which they were removed during the period of 'nationalisation'. Churches deconsecrated by the Bolsheviks and the Godless movement and transformed into 'museums of scientific atheism' have to be 'remuseumised' and reconsecrated—as has been the case with the Kazan and St. Isaac Cathedrals in St. Petersburg—although synagogues and mosques could also be mentioned in this context. In short, museums have become places that are doubly contested. This applies also to a number of wonderful apartment museums whose former inhabitants have ceased to be judged museum-worthy and whose buildings often rouse the appetite of estate agents because they occupy the best locations.

Before all else, however, we hear the question: what should be put into a museum and how should it be displayed? In other words, what historical narrative should the exhibitions follow? Needless to say, these disagreements are settled, or primarily settled, not by museum

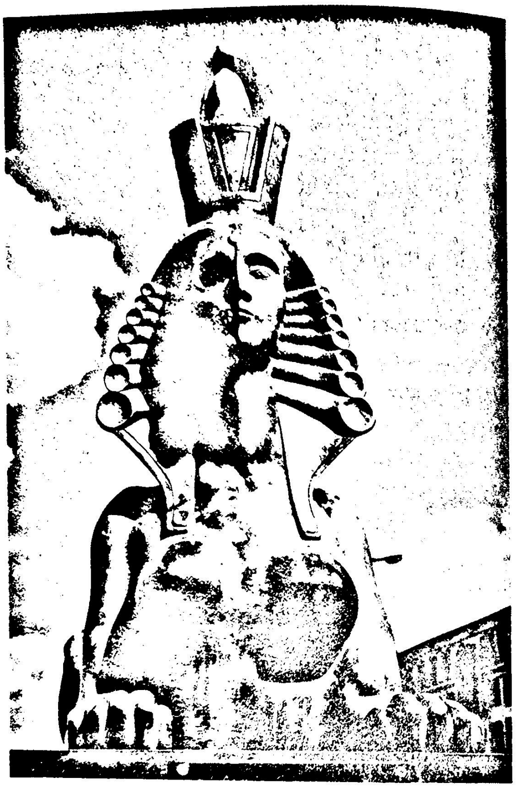

FIGURE 2.2. 'Metaphysical sphinx' is the name given to this monument to the victims of political repression in Leningrad/St. Petersburg by the Russian/American sculptor Mikhail Shemyakin. It was erected in 1995 on the Voskresensky Embankment of the Neva facing the Kresty Prison. © shutterstock.

experts, but by the great 'ideological apparatuses', to take up the term coined by Louis Althusser—in short, by the powers-that-be that preside over interpretation. These range from the academies to the popular writers, from advertisers to the tourist industry, and from sponsors to religious organisations. Above all, however, they include those who believe it is their prerogative to determine the historical consciousness of the nation as they wish: the political elites and their ideological advisers.

We have long since found ourselves engaged in a struggle to find a new 'grand narrative' for Russian history, especially twentieth-century Russian history. This can be seen in the monument war that has been fought throughout the land: the war about the monument for Felix Dzerzhinsky on Lubyanka Square that was demolished in 1991; or about the building of a monument in the Kremlin for St. Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kyiv, which was originally supposed to be posted on the façade of Lomonosov University in the Sparrow Hills, towering high above the Moskva River. In the controversies about the development and acceptance of a new grand historical narrative, the interpretation of the Russian Revolution and the Great Terror will play a crucial role. No one knows what that history will look like in the future. A well-known joke from Soviet times claimed that 'nothing is so unpredictable as the past'.

CHAPTER 3

Return to the Scene: Petrograd 1917

Entire libraries have been written about the Russian Revolution and thousands of studies of the events of 1917 have immeasurably increased our knowledge, as have the memoirs of participants or those affected by it. From almost every vantage point light falls on the scene; from the heights of world history; from the viewpoint of the victors and of those who barely escaped with their skin; from the viewpoint of officers who mislaid their army; and from that of the proletarians who were supposed to become the ruling class, at least in name. We have the testimony of people who popped up from underground movements, and of others in Bolshevik Russia who were compelled to flee underground or else across the frontier. Diplomats who stayed at their posts through the turbulence and became the involuntary witnesses of world-historical events also made their own small contributions to the mosaic that makes up the vast panorama. The memory of the Revolution has been 'preserved for all eternity' and locked up in Soviet archives or published abroad in the form of memoirs in the 'Archive of the Russian Revolution', listed in the reference catalogues of the Hoover Institution at Stanford, and last but not least, stored in the minds of millions whom no one has asked and who have left behind no written 'testimony'. Taken together, these resources have delivered the material for the reconstruction of the events from which the main lines and turning points of developments could be distilled. They attempt to explain why it all happened and how it came about that the Soviets were able to seize power. They are the starting point from where, further along in time and from a higher vantage point, accounts emerge that in one respect at least surpass all contemporary witnesses: they know how the story continued.[1]

And yet, it was a privilege to have been around at the time, a privilege nothing can replace. It makes up for the limitations experienced

by the participants and which those born later were spared. Some eyewitnesses of those 'Ten Days That Shook the World' were still alive when the Soviet power that was created then came to an end.

Eyewitnesses lead us back into the tumult in which everything was still open and no end, let alone 'a logical end', was in sight. They depended on their own eyes to form a judgement that frequently could be no more than a first impression. They could not yet base their opinion on the knowledge available to those born later. They were compelled to 'come to their own view' without outside assistance. But their imperfect knowledge can redound to their advantage. However limited their knowledge of the larger context, they had the entire scene, fresh and undivided, before their very eyes; they lacked the specialisation that carves up into different objects and spheres things that belong together.

Ten Days That Shook the World

It is an unearned piece of good fortune to be in the right place at the right time. Of those who have made something of it, the American journalist John Reed and the Russian socialist Nikolay Sukhanov belong in the first rank. It is only right that all subsequent commentators on the Russian Revolution should have appealed to them as crown witnesses. Thanks to them, everyone could be caught up in the whirl of events and become an involved spectator, a reporter of things as they happened and the creator of an authoritative narrative.

When John Reed arrived in Petrograd in September 1917, he already had considerable experience. Born in 1887 as the son of a businessman in Portland, Oregon, he attended private school and then Harvard, where he edited a student magazine, became an enthusiastic sportsman and formed a friendship with Walter Lippmann, a contemporary. He had been on a Grand Tour through Belle Epoque Europe and formed friendships with left-wing intellectuals of Greenwich Village—Lincoln Steffens, Max Eastman—and his own later wife, Louise Bryant. As a journalist, he had reported on factory disputes in the USA but above all on the Mexican Revolution. The art scene in prewar Paris was not the best place for a pacifist activist and so after the outbreak of the First World War, he went as a war reporter to Southern and Eastern Europe: to Salonika, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Constantinople, as well as to the Jewish settlements of the Russian Empire, which had become a war zone. In September 1917 Reed arrived at the place where, as a reporter who made no secret of his political convictions and eagerness for a scoop, he could deploy all his talents.[2]

Nikolay Nikolaevich Sukhanov came from a very different world, even though he belonged to the same generation. Born in Moscow in 1882 to a rather more middle-class family—his father, who came from a family of Russified Germans, was a railway employee—he went through the stages typical of an alert young man of his generation. After high school, he undertook a journey to Paris, where he made contact with the political emigration. Following his return to Moscow, he took up the study of philology and philosophy. He was incarcerated in Taganka Prison, from which he was freed by demonstrators during the 1905 revolution. This was followed by further travel abroad, this time to Switzerland. On his return he was sentenced to exile in Arkhangelsk; from 1913 he was active in St. Petersburg, writing for various journals. As an adherent of the Zimmerwald antiwar movement among the Mensheviks and the representative of the 'socialist writers' group', he found himself right at the start of the February revolution a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which was the rival of the other main pole of power in Petrograd, the Provisional Government. Throughout 1917 he remained in positions—often in charge—from which he was in frequent contact with the leading figures in every party and through all the changes of government. After Maxim Gorky's *Novaya zhizn* was shut down by the Bolsheviks, he started work on his *Notes on the Revolution*, published by Grshebin Verlag 1919–1923.[3]

The paths of the two reporters frequently crossed with those of the actors in the events (Lenin, Trotsky, Antonov-Ovseenko and many others). Reed described their own appearance on the revolutionary stage; Sukhanov cited them as reliable eyewitnesses. At one point Lenin came even closer to Sukhanov than may have been to the latter's taste: the 10–23 September 1917 session of the Bolshevist leadership, at which the armed insurrection was decided upon and at

which Lenin appeared disguised with a wig, took place in Sukhanov's apartment on the Karpovka Naberezhnaya, No. 32, Flat 31—without Sukhanov's knowledge.[4] Trotsky repeatedly quoted from Sukhanov as a reliable chronicler and even described John Reed as the 'observer and participant, chronicler and poet of the insurrection'.[5]

John Reed and Nikolay Sukhanov describe periods of widely differing length, but for both men the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly which had long been proclaimed and upheld as the chief concern of almost all participants remained outside the framework of their accounts. Both aimed to follow the dynamic of events and the coalition changes that signalled shifts in power. This process began with the abdication of the Tsar, and that led to the establishment of a Provisional Government, which was forced in turn to share power with its adversary, the Soviets. This lasted through a number of attempted coups from both right and left, when power finally slipped from its hands in a brilliantly conducted campaign by the Bolsheviks. In less than a year, a series of blows led to the end of a three-hundred-year-old dynasty, the collapse of an empire, and the disintegration of its most powerful supports—above all, the army. Russia was transformed into what was at the time the freest country in the world, thanks to the collapse of power and subsequent anarchy. The imperial capital became a law-free space in which power lay in the hands of whoever controlled the armoured cars. The details of this tectonic shift, the disintegration and establishment of a new power, are familiar:

On 23 February/8 March [see chapter 46 on the introduction of the Red calendar], strikes, food shortages and demonstrations of women for International Women's Day metamorphosed into revolution; regiments stationed in the capital went over to the insurgents. On 27 February/12 March, the Provisional Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of worker delegates and the Provisional Committee of the Imperial Duma took over political leadership. On 2/15 March, the Tsar abdicated and on 3/16 March the Provisional Government was formed under the chairmanship of Prince Lvov—all of this accompanied and supported by violent clashes in the streets of Petrograd with large numbers of victims. In early April, after years of exile, Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd. On 3/16 June, the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, consisting of workers' and soldiers' deputies, convened. The demands for bread, land and peace intensified but the Bolsheviks' attempt early in June to use the increasingly radical movement for an uprising failed initially. The continuation of the war and the refusal to confirm the spontaneous occupation of land by peasant soldiers returning from the front increasingly undermined the authority of the Provisional Government. General Kornilov's attempt to restore 'peace and order' by means of a coup (27/29 August–9/11 September) failed abysmally. Other attempts in the form of a 'Democratic Conference' that would stabilise the situation by means of a so-called Preparliament until elections could be held and a constitutive assembly convoked went awry. On 10/23 September, the Bolshevist leadership settled on an armed uprising. This was prepared in minute detail, thanks to the authority of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. This ensured that the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, convened on 25 October/7 November, was confronted with the collapse of the Provisional Government and actual takeover of power by the Bolsheviks. In the days that followed, the Congress of Soviets adopted all the proclamations issued by the Bolsheviks including the ending of the war, the transfer of land to the peasants and the self-determination of the peoples of Russia. Following a protest and subsequent walkout by the Mensheviks and right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries, the Congress approved the formation of a government of people's commissars. The election for the Constituent Assembly took place, as previously arranged, on 12/25 November, but when it convened on 5/18 January 1918, it was violently dispersed by the Bolsheviks. These, then, were the chief events, turning points and forks in the road.

Topography of the Revolution

Chroniclers who wish to keep track of events inevitably become topographers. Whoever follows the actors must seek out the locations where the decisions are taken.[6] It is essential to describe the stage on which opponents confront each other; a glance into the auditorium tells you who garners the most applause and who is shouted down. Speeches and proclamations can usually be read *post festum* but whether a speaker holds an audience or the mood in the auditorium changes depends on a situation in which the spoken word is decisive. And in general, hardly anything about mass movements can be explained without knowledge of the relevant public space. It is there that arguments (whether considered or demagogic) are put forward, the willingness to act is aroused or reinforced, resignation overcome or strengthened. The 'Cirque Moderne' on the Petrograd side, Nicholas II's People's Palace in the park near the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Alexandrinsky Theatre–these are not empty place names but generate attitudes and convictions. Places and spaces have their own specific public, one that alters with time. The moment comes when the public mood changes and speakers who were once applauded are no longer allowed to open their mouths. The festively illuminated halls of the Mariinsky Palace, the Municipal Duma, the Tauride Palace or the Smolny theatre auditorium are worlds away from the regimental barracks and the factory buildings on the periphery of the city. 'In the softly glittering halls of the Marian Palace there was no revolution at all. It was all in Smolny, in the working-class sections of the capital and in the provincial towns and districts. And that revolution was racing down an inclined plane to a *dénouement*.'[7] Another scene is set in the Tauride Palace: 'The limitless spaces of the Palace swallowed up effortlessly and unnoticeably many hundreds of people, scurrying about with a busy look or obviously bored with inactivity. These were the deputies who "belonged" here, and looked like masters of the house rather shocked by the roistering of their uninvited guests.... But they were in the minority. The Palace was obviously filling up with an alien population, in fur coats, working-class caps, or army greatcoats. Among these, well-known figures from the intellectual political circles of Petersburg were seen at every step. All the Petersburgers active in political and public life were already gravitating there.' We have here 'a melting pot of events'. 'I was in the very crucible of great events, the laboratory of the revolution.'[8] Different again was the atmosphere in Smolny: 'In the rows of seats, under the white chandeliers, packed immovably in the aisles and on the sides, perched on every window-sill, and even the edge of the platform, the representatives of the workers and soldiers of all Russia waited in anxious silence or wild exultation the ringing of the chairman's bell.

There was no heat in the hall but the stifling heat of unwashed human bodies. A foul blue cloud of cigarette smoke rose from the mass and hung in the thick air.'[9]

A city of two million people like Petrograd was an organism built on routines that functioned; a demonstration, a skirmish was not enough to disrupt the normal flow of activities—the trams, the armies of droshkies, the arrival and departure times of the trains. On Nevsky Prospekt, Reed notes, 'Few people passed and there were no lights; but a few blocks away we could see the trams, the crowds, the lighted shop-windows, and the electric signs of the moving-picture shows—life going on as usual. We had tickets to the ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre—all the theatres were open—but it was too exciting out of doors.'[10] Even in parlous times, the town markets where domestic servants and messengers did their shopping still functioned. But if the servants preferred to join demonstrations, and if waiters in restaurants thought it beneath their dignity to accept a tip, then an era was drawing to its end. It could take quite a long time before a city started to grind to a halt. Even on 8 November, following the Bolshevik coup, Reed noted: 'Superficially all was quiet; hundreds of thousands of people retired at a prudent hour, got up early, and went to work. In Petrograd the street-cars were running, the stores and restaurants open, theatres going, an exhibition of paintings advertised.... All the complex routine of common life—humdrum even in wartime, proceeded as usual. Nothing is so astounding as the vitality of the social organism—how it persists, feeding itself, clothing itself, amusing itself, in the face of the worst calamities.'[11] Nor did theatre or opera performances get cancelled just because there were clashes with demonstrators at a crossroads in the city centre. The city turned into a huge marshalling yard: 'The soldiers flowed through the countryside from the rear and the front, recalling a great migration of people. In the cities they blighted the trams and boulevards, and filled all the public places. There were reports here and there of drunkenness, rowdiness and disorder.'[12]

John Reed and Nikolay Sukhanov went on undeterred, each on his own chosen route. They also ventured into no-go areas. If they wanted to keep up with events, they had to adjust to the rhythm of the committee meetings and St. Petersburg was the focal point of an

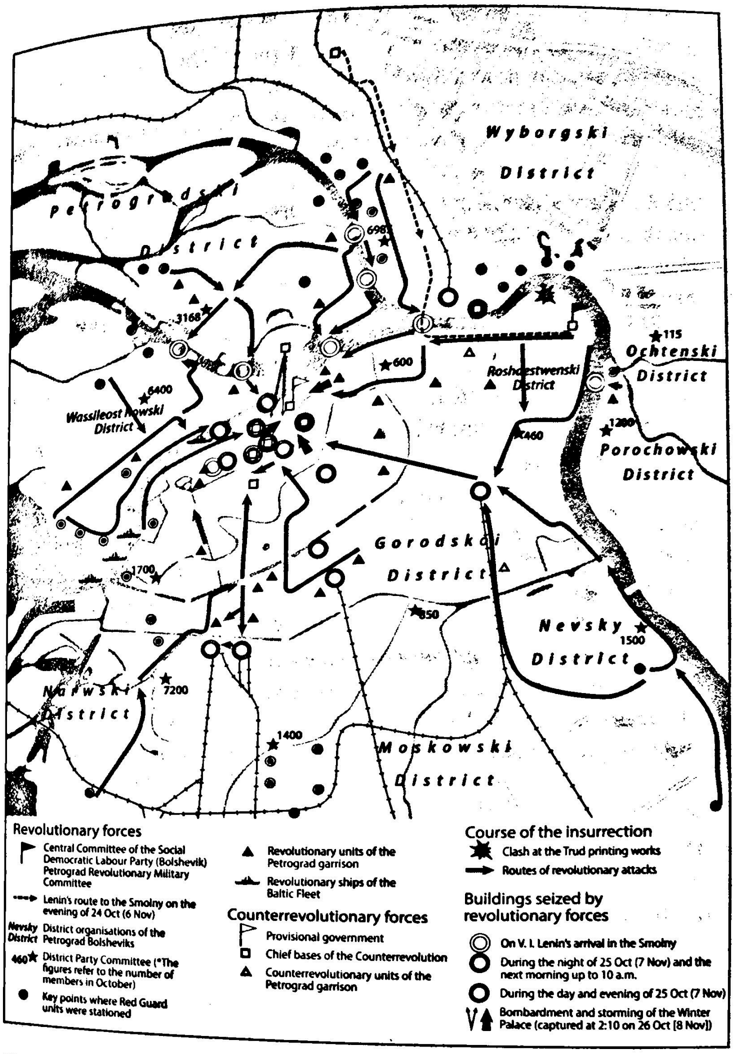
Wyborgski District
Petrogradski District
Wassileostrowski District
Roshdestwenski District
Ochtenski District
Porochowski District
Gorodski District
Nevsky District
Narwski District
Moskowski District
698
3168
6400
600
115
1200
460
1700
850
1500
7200
1400
Revolutionary forces
Central Committee of the Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik) Petrograd Revolutionary Military Committee
Lenin's route to the Smolny on the evening of 24 Oct (6 Nov)
Nevsky District
District organisations of the Petrograd Bolsheviks
460
District Party Committee (*The figures refer to the number of members in October)
Key points where Red Guard units were stationed
Revolutionary units of the Petrograd garrison
Revolutionary ships of the Baltic Fleet
Counterrevolutionary forces
Provisional government
Chief bases of the Counterrevolution
Counterrevolutionary units of the Petrograd garrison
Course of the insurrection
Clash at the Trud printing works
Routes of revolutionary attacks
Buildings seized by revolutionary forces
On V. I. Lenin's arrival in the Smolny
During the night of 25 Oct (7 Nov) and the next morning up to 10 a.m.
During the day and evening of 25 Oct (7 Nov)
Bombardment and storming of the Winter Palace (captured at 2:10 on 26 Oct [8 Nov])

FIGURE 3.1. An attempt to capture and represent the scene and the dynamic of events in October 1917 on a map: town plan of Petrograd. From *Illustrierte Geschichte der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1973, 131.

endless series of congresses, committees, conferences and meetings. The talks and debates in the brightly lit palace frequently did not begin before midnight and they resembled magnificent waiting rooms where exhausted passengers hoped to catch up on their sleep. The whole city was caught up in a permanent talking session:

> All Russia was learning to read and *reading*—politics, economics, history—because the people wanted to know.... In every city, in most towns, along the front, each political faction had its newspaper—sometimes several. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of organizations.... Then the Talk... lectures, debates, speeches—in theatres, circuses, school-houses, clubs, Soviet meeting-rooms, union headquarters, barracks.... What a marvellous sight to see Putilovsky Zavod (the Putilov Factory) pour out its forty thousand [workers].... In railway trains, street-cars, always the spurting up of impromptu debate, everywhere.... And the All-Russian Conferences and Congresses, drawing together the men of two continents—conventions of Soviets, *Zemstvos*, nationalities, priests, peasants, political parties, the Democratic Conference, the Moscow Conference, the Council of the Russian Republic. There were always three or four conventions going on in Petrograd. At every meeting, attempts to limit the time of speakers [were] voted down and every man [was] free to express the thought that was in him.[13]

To Sukhanov we are indebted for a cinematically precise depiction of the reception Lenin received at the Finland Station; Eisenstein subsequently adapted it for film. 'There was a throbbing of many motor cars. In two or three places the awe-inspiring outlines of armoured cars thrust up out of the crowd. And from one of the side-streets there moved out on to the square, startling the mob and cutting through it, a strange monster—a mounted searchlight, which abruptly projected along the bottomless void of the darkness tremendous strips of the living city, the roofs, many-storeyed houses, columns, wires, tramways, and human figures.'[14] Nor did the interior of the Kshesinskaya Palace escape his attention: 'The apartments of the famous ballerina had a rather strange and inappropriate look. The exquisite ceilings and walls out of all harmony with the unpretentious furnishings, the primitive table, chairs, and benches set casually about as required by business. There was very little furniture. Kshesinskaya's movable property had been put away somewhere, and it was only here and there that the remains of former grandeur were visible.'[15] And he registered the shock, the frenzy that overcame those present when Lenin appeared. 'I shall never forget that thunder-like speech, which startled and amazed not only me, a heretic who had accidentally dropped in, but all the true believers. I am certain that no one had expected anything of the sort. It seemed as though all the elements had risen from their abodes, and the spirit of universal destruction, knowing neither barriers nor doubts, neither human difficulties nor human calculations, was hovering around Kshesinskaya's reception-room above the heads of the bewitched disciples.... In those days this alone... was enough to make his listeners' heads spin.'[16]

The city moved fast, at least as long as taxis still ran and the telephone connections were intact. Cars and armoured vehicles succeeded droshkies and coaches; they gradually became mobile power centres. Again and again, the 'monstrous, dark armoured cars' recurred: 'whoever controlled the Bronneviki controlled the city'.[17] The leather-clad chauffeur now prescribed the tempo, not the Cossack on his horse or the flaneur along the Nevsky. The acceleration of events had something to do with the new means of communication—the telephone above all. In Reed's and Sukhanov's Petrograd, people were constantly on the phone. You can even find the emergency number—104-6[18]—and in the last analysis, the fate of the besieged Provisional Government in the Winter Palace, the General Staff and the garrisons was decided by the fact that the telephone lines were cut, breaking off contact to the city. We are indebted to John Reed for his report on entering the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government had barricaded itself in the hope of eventual rescue.

> At the end of the corridor was a large ornate room with gilded cornices and enormous crystal lustres, and beyond it several smaller ones, wainscoted with dark wood. On both sides of the parqueted floor lay rows of dirty mattresses and blankets upon which occasional soldiers were stretched out; everywhere was a litter of

cigarette butts, bits of bread, cloth and empty bottles with expensive French labels. More and more soldiers, with the red shoulder-straps of the *yunker* schools, moved about in a stale atmosphere of tobacco smoke and unwashed humanity. One had a bottle of white burgundy, evidently filched from the cellars of the palace. . . . The walls were covered with huge canvases in massive gilt frames—historical battle scenes . . . '12 October 1812' and '6 November 1812', '16–18 August 1815'. . . . One had a gash across the upper right hand corner.[19]

'The Crucible of Events'

Whoever follows in the footsteps of Reed or Sukhanov during those weeks will learn something about the interaction between the political nerve centres and the locations where the decisive action took place. The two men roamed tirelessly between the magnificent buildings of the capital that had become 'laboratories of the revolution', the newspaper offices and print works, the crossroads where critical situations developed, and in between they frequented the Café Vienna, which kept on going despite all the unrest. Armoured cars crossed the path of Easter Night processions. The routes taken by the chroniclers create a map of the capital's terrain with all its 'hot spot' frontiers, front line networks and junctions. It is not by chance that map readers keep popping up. Reed, for example, saw them in Smolny: 'A blast of stale air and cigarette smoke rushed out, we caught a glimpse of dishevelled men bending over a map under the glare of a shaded electric light.'[20] 'At the centre table, the huge Dybenko bent over a map, marking out positions for the troops with red and blue pencils. In his free hand he carried, as always, the enormous blue-steel revolver. Anon he sat himself down at a typewriter and pounded away with one finger; every little while he would pause, pick up the revolver, and lovingly spin the chamber.'[21] With this Reed had an insight key to the course of the Revolution, the crucial link between cartographical knowledge (knowledge of the territory) and armed power (the ability to occupy it). Thus Reed's and Sukhanov's contributions are more than just a chronology of events and their temporal dynamics; they provide a history of a transformation of the power arena.

Their depiction of the course of the Revolution allows us to read off the topography of revolutionary Petrograd without difficulty, a city guide *sui generis*. Whoever reads their reports from this angle will find it easy to identify the key intersections, the principal interconnections, the neuralgic points.

These include, first, the crucial locations. They were important not just symbolically but because they were technically and spatially in a position to secure what Habermas termed the 'structural transformation of the public sphere'. Chief among these locations was the Tauride Palace, a vast estate built by Ivan Starov for Count Potemkin, the favourite of Catherine the Great and the founder of Novorossiya or New Russia. Between 1906 and 1917 the palace was the seat of the Imperial State Duma and now it became the seat of both the Provisional Committee of the State Duma and the Executive Committee of the Soviets. With its huge adjacent park, the palace became the setting for numerous demonstrations and assemblies. This was where Lenin proclaimed his April Theses and with the violent dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, this was where the lights of parliamentarianism went out in Russia.[22] The Smolny complex with its magical cathedral, built by Francesco Rastrelli, and a gigantic convent, which functioned as a boarding school for young, aristocratic ladies, served as the engine room of the opposing forces, which, situated somewhat away from the centre, was well protected and able to act as the venue for the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets and the seat of the Council of People's Commissars.[23] In a prominent position, opposite St. Isaac's Cathedral, stood the Mariinsky Palace, designed by the court architect Andrey Stackenschneider at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It had been extended before the Revolution to house the State Council of Imperial Russia and subsequently became the temporary seat of the Provisional Government until the latter moved to the Winter Palace, the Tsar's residence, which had become 'free' following his abdication.[24] Here and in the General Staff Building, which was located on the opposite side of the Palace Square, the Provisional Government was arrested and imprisoned on 7 November.

The Municipal Duma enjoys a special status here, if only because architecturally (it was designed by Giacomo Ferrari) it resembles Western European town halls and remained the focal point of resistance to the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks to the end.[25]

Second, standing at the opposite pole to the city that was the centre of power, we find the factories referred to again and again, by both Reed and Sukhanov. The attitude of the workers who kept the war machine going determined the course of events generally. The experience of the first Russian Revolution, which had taken place barely more than a decade previously, was still almost physically present: the strikes, the demonstrations and the massacres initiated by the Cossacks, the police and the army. Nor had the chauvinistic mobilisation for the Great War succeeded in undermining the St. Petersburg proletariat's experience of class struggle. With the coming of the Revolution, the social topography of the industrial landscape of St. Petersburg started to shift once more. The workers moved from the periphery to the centre. At its heart, initially, were the factories on the Vyborg and Petrograd side—many belonged to international firms, such as Lessner, Erikson, Promet, Langsiepen, Vulkan, Siemens & Halske, Nobel Brothers, the Tube Mill, the Baltic Shipyard, the Cable Works, the San Galli workshops, the Putilov engineering works, the Skorokhod shoe factory, the cotton spinning plant, Siemens-Schuckert and Russky Renault.

The third complex that can be identified is that of the barracks, the guards regiments and the military and officer schools. With their parade grounds, schools, accommodation, riding schools, garages and workshops, they almost constituted a city within a city, with the prevailing powers depending on their stability, loyalty and reliability. With its 200,000-strong garrison, the capital was a city of barracks and soldiers, and the 'peasants in grey military overcoats' were soon to become the chief agents in the dissolution of the old order. The history of revolution in Petrograd can be traced, therefore, by the decisions taken in the barracks, by the change in attitude that took place there, among the Lithuanian, Volhynian, Izmailovsky, Finnish, Semyonovsky, Pavlovsky, Preobrazhensky and other regiments.[26]

The fourth complex relates to the infrastructure that held the city together and kept it going. Whoever controlled it, controlled the city. That began with basic geographical factors. St. Petersburg is divided by numerous river arms and canals and is held together only by its bridges. Whoever controls the bridges, controls life in the metropolis—only in winter, when the Neva is frozen and rail tracks and streets are laid down over the ice, does the role of the bridges become less dominant; without the bridges there could be no history of revolution in Petrograd. In Reed and Sukhanov, the bridges turn up again and again in the struggle for control of the city—the Dvortsovy Bridge, the Nikolaevsky Bridge, the Troitsky Bridge, the Liteyny Bridge and the very important Sampsonievsky Bridge linking the Vyborg and Petrograd sides of the river.[27] The same may be said of the railway stations, the city gates and the junctions linking the capital with its hinterland, with the Empire. These links enabled Petrograd to be supplied with food and raw materials: through them the peasant soldiers entered the city in the hundreds of thousands; they were the transit stations for the great migration of nations, for people, weapons, ideas and slogans. And what is true of the St. Petersburg railway stations—the Finland, the Nikolaevsky, the Baltic, the Warsaw and the station on the line to Tsarskoe Selo—holds for the control of the telephone and telegraph communication networks, for the energy supply—the electricity works—and for the circulation of money, that is, the control of the state bank and banking network.[28]

There is even a map to represent the battle for minds. It displays the offices of such papers as the *Russkaya volya*, *Pravda*, *Robochy i soldat* and *Novaya zhizn*, which contained texts, appeals and posters as well as the printers which in the emerging age of mass movements could make the difference between victory and defeat.

Many organisations remained active and merely changed their personnel. Prisons, places of repression and incarceration, were kept up despite the ruptures of history and remained intact. This held for the Petrograd prisons—the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Kresty and Shpalernaya Prisons, from which inmates of the old regime were released, replaced by inmates of the new regime.

The most volatile were the public spaces and squares where the confrontation of power and populace unfolded. The Petrograd of 1917 had its zones of contact and conflict, its squares for parades and locations for barricades—often a repeat of the revolutionary clashes of 1905. Above all, it was Nevsky Prospekt that repeatedly became the arena, the mighty parade ground, together with the Znamenskaya Square in front of the Nikolaevsky Station, the square in front of Kazan Cathedral and the Palace Square between the Winter Palace and the General Staff Building.

There has been no lack of attempts at a cartographic representation of the landscape of power, its dissolution and regrouping. The available methods are well known: map symbols, lines, hatched surfaces, arrows, the use of colours and points together with dates. The colour red signifies 'on the march', blue 'in retreat'. Little red flags mark Bolshevist underground bases, the seat of Party committees and the large factories in the grip of strikes. Universities and institutes that have joined the revolutionary movement are highlighted. Dotted lines trace the routes taken by demonstrators and red circles mark the most important meeting points. Crosses are used to indicate clashes. Arrows show where troop units have gone over to the Revolution while yellow circles indicate the buildings occupied by the insurgents on 24 October. The bridges are especially highlighted. The centres—Smolny, Tauride Palace, Mariinsky Palace—are shown on the map as outline façades. The regiments are indicated by name. Lenin's route from the underground to Smolny on 24 October is shown by one broken line, while another is supposed to show the shot fired by the *Aurora* on 25 October at 21:40 and the bombardment of the Winter Palace from the Peter and Paul Fortress. The surrounding and capture of the Winter Palace is dated 26 October at 2:10.[29]

The crispest account is the view of the military situation in the city as described by the chief organiser of the conquest—Leon Trotsky:

> The city was divided into military divisions, each subordinate to the nearest headquarters. At the most important points, companies of the Red Guard were concentrated in coordination with the neighboring military units, where companies on duty were awake and ready. The goal of each separate operation, and the forces for it, were indicated in advance. All those taking part in the insurrection from top to bottom—in this lay its power, in this also at times its Achilles' heel—were imbued with absolute confidence that the victory was going to be won without casualties. The main operation began at two o'clock in the morning. Small military parties, usually with a nucleus of armed workers or sailors under the leadership of commissars, occupied simultaneously, or in regular order, the railroad stations, the lighting plant, the munition and food stores, the waterworks, Dvortsovy Bridge, the telephone exchange, the state bank, the big printing plants. The telegraph station and the post office were completely taken over. Reliable guards were placed everywhere. Meager and colorless is the record of the episodes of that October night. It is like a police report.[30]

Soviet cartography has taken the very greatest care to indicate 'Lenin's places', in other words, all the locations—apartments, meeting places, spots where he gave speeches, offices—that had any connection with Lenin's life. There is also an intensive mapping of proletarian Petrograd. These maps may well create the impression that victory was predestined and that there never was a moment when the future was in doubt. Until a method has been devised to capture the revolutionary movement entirely by cartographical means, the eyewitness accounts of yore—those of Reed and Sukhanov—will continue to be the best-informed guides to the historical setting.

'On s'engage et puis . . . on voit'

Eyewitnesses at the time could not know what events would play out on this stage. John Reed, who in 1918 had temporarily returned to the United States in order to enlist support for Soviet Russia in the country of the 'Red Scare', returned to Moscow for the Second World Congress of the Comintern and died there of typhus on 19 October 1920. Nikolay Sukhanov returned to the second rank, occupied various positions abroad in the 1920s and worked on economic and cooperative issues. In 1931 he was sentenced to ten years in gaol in the show trial against the Mensheviks, which he spent in the notorious Verkhneuralsk politisolator political prison. Scarcely had he been freed—he had been working as a German teacher in Tobolsk—when he was rearrested in 1937, the year of the Great Terror—this time as a German agent. Subjected to torture, he confessed and was sentenced

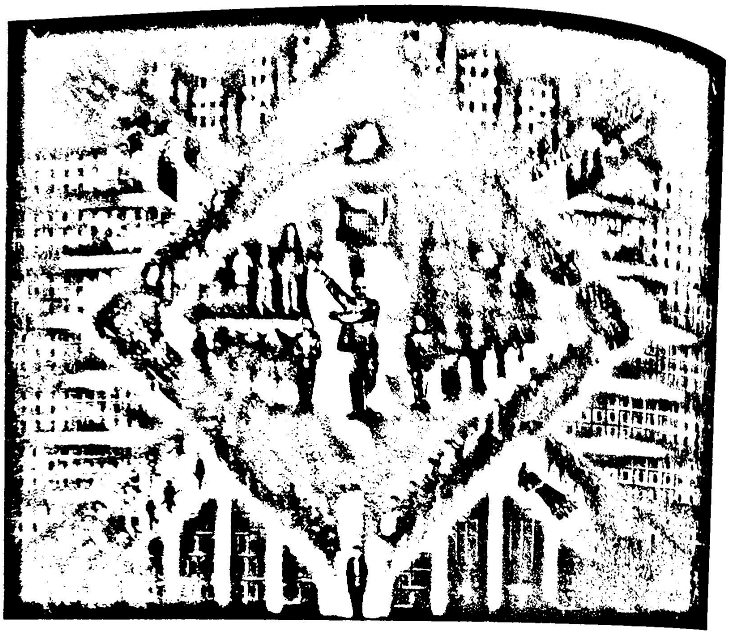

FIGURE 2.2. Kliment Redko (1897–1956) painted *Insurrection* in 1925 with Lenin as its centre of energy, but one under threat since those close to him would later fall victim to the Terror. Acquired by George Costakis. © State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Photo: culture-images/fai.

to death on 29 June 1940. He was executed on the same day in the prison in Omsk. Trotsky, himself a brilliant journalist and historian who always spoke highly of both Reed and Sukhanov, was murdered on 21 August 1940 in Coyoacán in Mexican exile, almost at the same time as Sukhanov in Omsk and in the same country where John Reed's career as reporter had begun.

Even Lenin could not know what would become of the scene in which he had acted as the 'demon of world destruction', to cite Sukhanov's words. In the last year of his life, Lenin read Sukhanov's personal record of the Revolution. In his response there is no dearth of disparaging comments or derogatory remarks about a political opponent—'pedantry', 'incomprehension of the dialectic', 'irrepressible phrase-mongering', 'clichéd thinking'. But Lenin's cursory reading of Sukhanov's very substantial book ends in a not exactly typical reflection about the prospects for the Russian Revolution and his own part in it. In a kind of dialogue with Sukhanov, he wrote:

> You say that civilization is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilization in our country by expelling the landowners and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving toward socialism? Where, in what books, have you read that such variations of the customary historical sequence of events are impermissible or impossible? Napoleon, I think, wrote: 'On s'engage et puis … on voit.' Rendered freely this means: 'First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens.' Well, we did first engage in a serious battle in October 1917, and then saw such details of development (from the standpoint of world history they were certainly details) as the Brest peace, the New Economic Policy, and so forth. And now there can be no doubt that in the main we have been victorious. It never occurs to our Sukhanovs, to say nothing of Social-Democrats still further to the right, that revolutions cannot be made any other way. It never even occurs to our European philistines that subsequent revolutions in Oriental countries, which possess much vaster populations in a much vaster diversity of social conditions, will undoubtedly display even greater peculiarities than those dished up by the Russian Revolution.[31]

People who think that the course of world history could be foreseen in a textbook are simply fools in Lenin's opinion. He himself preferred to leave his readers perplexed—this text appeared in *Pravda* on 30 May 1923—by the confession of his own perplexity.